

What is Annotation?

Annotation is an active reading strategy that improves comprehension. Annotation is **having a conversation with what you're reading** instead of just letting your eyes pass over the words. When annotating, a reader organizes information by marking the text with notes or symbols and/or writing brief key points in the margins. Though not required, some students may choose to use color-coding techniques using highlighters and/or Post-it notes and tabs. (There is a great variety of annotation tools available where office supplies are sold.)

Why Annotate?

Research shows that annotation has a profound effect on comprehension and retention, cuts down on study time, and improves student outcomes. This close reading technique is meant to help you identify, remember, and recall essential information in a text. Annotating helps you read actively. It slows you down, sharpens your thinking, and helps you notice what matters. Strong readers do not simply move through a text; they interact with it.

Additionally, since you are permitted to use your text during in-class essay tests, thoughtful annotations will help you locate important passages quickly and support your answers with confidence.

What to Look For...

1. Vocabulary & Language

- Circle or underline unfamiliar words, write brief definitions in the margin
- Notice unusual or striking word choices
- Circle, highlight, or underline important keywords, terms, and/or definitions.

2. Notable, Quotable

- Mark lines that seem meaningful or powerful
- Make note of passages that generate a strong positive or negative response.

3. Questions

- Write down questions to bring up during class discussion
- Put a question mark next to passages or problems you don't understand.

4. Important Plot Points

- Indicate shifts in narration, setting, moments of conflict, climax, and resolution.

5. Personal Response/Mood

- React honestly: agreement, frustration, surprise, humor
- Make connections to other texts or your own experience

6. Character

- Note moments of character development/change
- Map character arc

6. Themes

- Make note of themes, identify big ideas (love, honor, pride, justice, fate)
- Mark passages that suggest a message the author is trying to convey

7. Literary Devices

- Look for metaphors, similes, and any of the devices we've studied in class
- Notice symbolism and irony
- Mark foreshadowing or recurring ideas/motifs

Helpful Margin Marks: Here are some symbols you might want to use to keep your annotations clear, quick, and consistent:

- ? = Question/confusion
- ?? = Very confusing / revisit later
- ! = Important or surprising
- !! = Very important
- * = Theme or central idea
- ** = Major theme
- → = Connection (to another text, idea, or life)
- ↔ = Connection between two parts of the text
- C = Character insight
- T = Theme
- D = Literary device
- S = Symbolism
- I = Imagery
- F = Foreshadowing
- IR = Irony
- R = Repetition/pattern
- Q = Good discussion question
- ↑ = Shift or increase (tension, emotion, importance)
- ⚡ = Striking language or powerful moment
- ♥ = Emotional reaction
- ≠ = Contrast/contradiction
- = = Similar idea or parallel

How Much Annotation Should I have? Remember, annotations should be about information YOU think is important. This is to help you think clearly and remember information. That said, aim for a minimum of 3 marks per page and be sure to include a variety of notes, underlining, and circling. Students who only underline passages, for example, will not score well on annotation assessments.